

Commentary for "CULT & CULTURE", a documentary on Cuban culture and its relationship to the personality cult of Fidel Castro.

Length: 1127ft

Time: 28  $\frac{1}{2}$  minutes

The Commentary is written for 3 voices:

1. Commentator
2. Old Guard - ie, pre-revolutionary Communist, hard, woman's voice.
3. New Guard - post-revolutionary intellectual, young voice.

Other voices are specified, eg. Fidel (Castro), Guillen, the National Poet of Cuba, President Dorticos.

TIME

COMMENTARY

00.-0.38

Title sequence.

0.38-1.51

Commentator

Prior to the Revolution, the patronage of art in Cuba had been in the hands of the bourgeoisie. Leaving a Cuba that would no longer tolerate their privileges, they left their beautiful homes empty, and they left a vacuum in the patronage of art. A Cuban Communist of the Old Guard describes the situation before the Revolution in this way:

Old Guard

"It is naturally impossible to maintain that a landowning bourgeoisie, ignorant and coarse as ours, wallowing in vice and corruption, could ~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~ be in the least concerned for the fate of our culture.

3.05-3.56

President Dorticos

"It was an indisputable fact that, before the triumph of the Revolution, culture was the preoccupation of minorities; and that the intellectuals formed a very much reduced group, condemned, in the majority of cases, to vegetate, earning their living by other means than those of creative activity.

"If, in a capitalist society, ~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~ cultural activity is always confined to minorities, socialism, by definition, signifies a constant preoccupation with the raising of the cultural level of the masses, placing at their disposal all the means employable for this goal."

Commentator Under Socialism art is no longer the concern of  
monied individuals, but of the State.

1.58  
Text on film LONG LIVE SOCIALIST CUBA!

2.00  
Commentator The permanent exhibition known as the Cuban  
Pavilion tells of the transformation effected  
and to be effected by Socialism.

2.05  
Text SOCIALISM ~~MEAN~~ MEANS PLANNING

2.09  
Commentator If, before the Revolution,

Old Guard "the overwhelming majority of the population,  
trapped in their misery, bowed down by inhuman  
conditions of life, logically kept themselves  
apart from all cultural activity, now, by  
liberating ourselves from imperialist oppression,  
culture can become the preoccupation of the vast  
majority, and the separation between the artist  
and his public can be dissolved."  
"In a socialist society, the Government and the  
Party have the duty not only of promoting the  
development of culture, but also of directing  
it towards desirable ends."

3.03-3.56  
President Dorticos "Artists and writers must go to the people -  
not descending, but ascending to them. The  
people are to be honoured, and to do so as  
professionals you must go to them with the  
highest literary and artistic excellence. In  
the people is to be found the source of future  
works, the daily inspiration and the supreme  
inspiration. And to the people the literary or  
artistic products must finally return - a return  
of the treasures which the people give to their  
artists every day."

Guillen, Cuba's  
National Poet

"To paint from first-hand, to describe what a People's Farm or a co-operative is while living there, to go to villages lost in the heart of the mountains, or to the depths of the forests, to live on the farms, to touch with our hands the sweating skin of miners, to travel about the Island we own, kissing her like a newly-won woman - everything, in short, which constitutes life in these dramatic days, and which belongs to our struggle for liberty, must be experienced by us and expressed in print, stone, music, colour."

3.57

Commentator

The people, the Revolution, the country, should supply inspiration for the artist. And the people themselves, in the same way inspired, become folk artists. But what is the situation of the professional artist under the patronage of the State?

4.30-5.45

Commentator

One of the many artists who did not leave Cuba is Portocarrero. His work is popular in the States, and he has an international status, so he could easily have left. The Revolution has made no noticeable difference to his development: best known as an abstract artist, his current obsession is with Indian head-dresses. He was part of Cuban pre-revolutionary culture. Now he has to fit into revolutionary culture. He is one of those of whom Fidel Castro has said:

Fidel Castro

"The Revolution should act in such a manner that the whole group of artists and intellectuals who are not genuinely revolutionaries can find within the Revolution a place to work and create.

"There can, of course, be artists, and good artists, who do not have a revolutionary attitude towards life, and it is for precisely that group of artists and intellectuals that the Revolution constitutes a problem."

5.45-6.26

Commentator

Another artist, Mariano, who describes his works as "abstract abstractionism", is one of those condemned by the Old Guard as "an expression of capitalist decadence". But the word of Fidel is, as always, final:

Fidel

"When Kruschev criticised abstract art in Moscow, the satellites asked me to forbid abstract art. And I replied, our adversaries are capitalism and imperialism, not the abstract painters."

6.26-8.04

Commentator

More obviously expressive of capitalist decadence prior to the Revolution were Havana's nightclubs.

Old Guard

"Havana, as is well-known, had been converted into a symbol of time-wasting and illicit entertainment of all kinds, while the population of the country was intoxicated with ~~the~~ distractions and entertainments in the worst taste, very often frankly pornographic, which in massive doses were dealt out to them."

7.06

Commentator

1

Now nationalised and somewhat purified, Havana's night-clubs remain open, and do excellent business. The night-clubs were, and are, the training-ground for new singers and dancers: but whereas before they could look forward to international tours, and international fame, this outlet is now barred to them. The Afro-Cuban jazz musicians have already left. Many of the dancers and singers, of whom there is a surplus, would like to leave.

Old Guard

"Entertainment for entertainment's sake has, in reality, little to do with socialist society."

Commentator

And yet the clubs continue. The population of the country is still intoxicated with distractions and entertainments. The night-clubs have not been abolished because the people and the leaders of the Revolution like them. It would be as unthinkable as to abolish Carnival.

8.34

Old Guard

"In opposition to the so-called "culture of the masses", which proliferates in capitalist society and which maintains that large majorities are in no way capable of appreciating true culture, and must be fed with the trash of spectacles and vulgar entertainments, the Revolutionary Government has set up the principle of "culture for the masses", that is to say, to raise the masses and make them possessors of the knowledge accumulated by humanity in its long years of evolution."

9.32-11.02

Commentator

A new manifestation for Cuba of the "culture for the masses" is the May Day Parade - more serious than Carnival, a replacement of the religious by the political procession, part of the mystique of communist culture. It is the day on which the people affirm their at-oneness with the Revolution, and with the personification of the Revolution, Fidel Castro.

Fidel

"If they ask us revolutionaries what matters most to us, we will say the people, and we will always say the people. The people in their true sense, that is, the majority of the people, those who have had to live in exploitation and in the cruellest neglect. Our basic concern will always be the great majority of the people, that is, the oppressed and exploited classes. The point of view through which we view everything is this: whatever is good for them will be good for us: whatever is noble, useful, and beautiful for them, will be noble, useful and beautiful for us.

"Whoever is more of an artist than a revolutionary cannot think exactly the same as we do. We struggle for the people without inner conflict, we know that we can achieve what we have set out to do. The principal goal is the people. We have to think about the people before we think about ourselves, and that is the only attitude that can be defined as a truly revolutionary attitude."

Text

REBEL RADIO

11.11-12.13

Old Guard

"Imperialism developed and utilized the media of TV and radio in order to influence and form public opinion, disseminating to the people, by means of the superficial entertainment, of the so-called "culture of the masses" its conception of life and of man. There is no doubt that, when the revolution began, radio and TV enjoyed great popularity in our country."

Commentator

Before the Revolution, there <sup>were</sup> 5 TV ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ networks in Cuba; now there are only two, which Cuban revolutionaries look upon as a more reasonable number for a country as small and short of resources as Cuba.

According to one of the heads of Cuban TV, before the Revolution, TV "appealed to the romantic and sentimental ~~sentiments~~ <sup>feelings</sup>, without any constructive message, with no intention of raising the cultural standards. Our intention is to turn radio and TV into a vehicle of healthy entertainment for the Cuban people, but at the same time to gradually improve its content and to make its message as cultural as possible."

But while this process is taking place, Cuban TV makes full use of its serial "The Black Pirate", not noticeably different from a thousand similar romantic and sentimental programmes in capitalist countries.

12.13-12.34

Commentator

In socialist Cuba there is no sales advertising. Posters to advertise cultural events like the Russian Circus, Woman's Day, or road safety are common. In place of advertising as we know it there is work propaganda.

12.34

Text

LONG LIVE THE WORK HEROES!

~~THE~~ PERFECT SOCIALISTS!

BROTHERS OF THE PEOPLE, SONS OF THE PEOPLE.

- 13.00-13.16  
Commentator  
The people are surrounded by exhortations to work as people in a capitalist society are surrounded by enticements to buy.
- 13.16  
Text  
STUDY & WORK - GUN  
UNITY - DEVOTION TO DUTY - DEFENCE
- 13.58-14.01  
Text  
The sugar industry of the people.  
Construction!
- 13.58-14.01  
Commentator  
The posters exhort. The people answer to the exhortation. Life imitates propaganda.
- 14.10  
Text  
Committee for the Defence of the Revolution.  
Forward with the economy - with more productivity.  
Aims of the Cuban Revolution - food, clothes, houses, medicine, education, recreation.
- 14.22-14.51  
Commentator  
At his workplace, the good workman sets up the evidence of his own revolutionary ardour.
- New Guard  
"The Revolution is not an abstract entity. For the student, it means studying more and better, for the worker, to raise his qualifications and, in consequence, to raise the productivity of his work; for the intellectual, to fight for the hegemony of marxism, for the new socialist culture."
- 14.58-15.52  
Commentator  
The desire for a new, above all Cuban culture, is part of the atmosphere of militant patriotism.
- 15.22  
Text  
CUBA SI, YANKIS NO!
- Guillen  
"We will create a culture that will give us a distinctive character and ~~the~~ spirit, that will

the imperialist force, based on hatred among men."

Commentator

For nationalistic Cuba, the nature of her cultural identity can only be defined after the rejection of all American influences.

15.26

Commentator

This memorial is to the American battleship "The Maine", which was mysteriously blown up in Havana harbour in 1898, marking the start of the Spanish-American war. The memorial commemorates the victory of the United States over Spain, by which the island of Cuba became independent, with an independence guaranteed by the United States. After the Revolution, the Cubans knocked down the American eagles that crowned the memorial, looking upon them as symbols of American imperialism. They added their own inscription to the memorial, to the effect that they were only liberated from Spanish oppression to fall under North American oppression.

XK.

But with or without the eagles, the Havana skyline still resembles that of Miami.

The Cubans consider that culturally as well as economically they were dominated by the North Americans, who despised Latin America as "Savage and inferior". Their revenge is to kick out Uncle Sam. But even the socialist parade must have its drum majorette, like any Yankee football match.

16.45

Commentator

The strong colour-bar that operated in Cuba before the Revolution has now been removed, giving the very large Negro population absolute equality. Afro-Cuban bands always were, and still are, indispensable for Carnival. Dark faces dominate the military bands of the Rebel Army. It was within the Rebel Army, fighting side by side with whites, that Negroes first found social ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ acceptance. The reaction from the domination of North American culture has led to a revaluation of formerly despised elements of Cuban culture, among which the negro strain seems by far the most vigorous



Nowadays it is possible for one of Cuba's new ballet groups to base its repertoire on Afro-Cuban folklore, which has a newly acquired respectability.

Old Guard

"During the entire period of the Republic, the expressions of African cultures transplanted to Cuba by the negro slaves were officially despised, in accordance with the criteria of the ideology of Western cultures. Considered as manifestations of savage peoples, their liturgical ceremonies had to take place in the face of police persecution."

Commentator

The Afro-Cuban element was always present: it took a Revolution to allow its vigour openly to penetrate and inspire the white, Spanish-biased society.

21.09

Commentator

Artists like Portocarrero could long ago look for their themes in Afro-Cuban folklore, as in this painting of the black patron saint of the Cuban Negro. Now, the government gives its official approval to paving-stones decorated with Afro-Cuban cult symbols.

21.35

Commentator

Many African students are given scholarship to Cuba. Considering themselves as recently liberated from coca-colonialism, the Yankee form of colonialism, Cubans feel solidarity with the African victims of European colonialism. Negritude is fashionable.

21.35-24.43

Commentator

The drama Chichere Ku is based on a number of West African legends. A Cuban puppet troupe presents the play, blending puppets and live actors, using the spoken word, music and dance in a novel form.

What has an African folk-tale to do with social realism?

A young intellectual replies to this question:

New Guard

"Art supposes a permanent experimentation, an untiring search, a dissatisfaction that gives noX respite to the creator, and which, in every work and in every historical period, offers the spectator a new and fuller image of the world. For this reason, the artist is only revolutionary to the extent that he uncovers new elements of reality and by so doing shows their beauty, their expressivity, their inner meaning."

24.43-25.42

Commentator

A new culture requires a new history, or rather a re-writing of history from a marxist viewpoint. The Cuban Pavilion helps to do this graphically.

24.52

Text

Colonial life: The colony was a huge forge. Indians; Spaniards, Negroes, Chinese created a unique and very personal way of ~~being~~<sup>life</sup>. The Cuban was born.

New Guard

"Not only do we want to tear down the moral, political, and ideological evil of the past, in the most obvious, direct and practical sense, but to do it profoundly and substantially."

25.13

Text

"The Maine" - an autoggression to justify an intervention.

25.56

Text

Fidel in the mountains - 2 of December 1956, disembarkation of Fidel in the Coloradas.

25.57-26.03

Commentator

For the Cuban people, the re-writing of history from a marxist, anti-imperialist viewpoint was justified by the CIA-backed invasion of the Cuban exiles at the Bay of Pigs.

26.03

Text

The glories of the people are the ~~XXXX~~ glories of all - the Bay of Pigs Victory.

Commentator

The bombarded houses have been left as monuments, wreathes perpetuate the memory of the dead.

26.15-26.22

Text

This cabin was destroyed during the attack of the mercenaries on this beach.

Commentator

The invasion is already an important part of marxist orientated history, of a new national mythology.

The youth of Cuba look, and learn their lesson.

26.49-26.54

Commentator

The words of Martí, the Cuban national hero, are everywhere used as slogans:

Text

To be educated is to be free.

Children are born to be happy.

26.57-27.18

Old Guard

"The Revolutionary government gave priority to the problems of education with the objective of converting the worker and the peasant into conscientious citizens, capable of contributing to the construction of socialism. The new schools of revolutionary instruction, which actively spread the science of marxism-leninism, assist in this purpose."

27.18

Text

To help in education is to triumph.

27.22-27.50

Commentator

The Revolution started with the university students. Students like Echavarría, whose picture looks down on the university steps, were martyred, and are remembered along with those who died in the revolution. But foremost among the folk heroes is Martí, called the Apostle, who died long before, at the end of the last century, fighting to liberate Cuba from Spain. Of the Revolution it is said: "Martí promised it: Fidel fulfilled it." Martí's statue is to be found everywhere in Cuba. He is the Apostle: but whose Apostle? For many Cubans, it is Fidel who is the Christ-figure: crowned with the thorns of the martyrdom he apparently expects. The beard and long hair, the self-sacrifice for the people, assist the deification.

Standing beneath the statue of Martí to make his speeches, he becomes also a reincarnation of that poet-patriot. His word, whether it concerns economy, defence, culture, is final. No challenge of his authority is tolerated.

The question is, whether this cult of the personality can be challenged by the intellectuals. The Revolution has brought them a different kind of freedom - they will not easily continue to let one man have absolute authority over that freedom.

*A representative of the New Guard expresses it in this way:*

New Guard

"It is not enough to study Marxism, however rigorously or assiduously. The study of marxism is not psychotherapy."

Commentator

The poet Guillen, writing of Martí, says:

"Very often we forget that the heroes of our independence were men of flesh and blood. We idealize them to such an extent that we turn them into something else, into other beings, sometimes into demigods." How many Cubans apply this to Castro?

Commentator

And a young intellectual, himself a marxist, has written:

New Guard

"There are serious deficiencies in the marxist theory of art, brought about by well-known historical circumstances: the "personality cult".

28.50

Commentator

The posters outside the sport stadium show the strong swimmer - the table-tennis champion - the expert golfer - the chess-thinker - the underwater fisherman - the baseball player - always and everywhere, Fidel.

29.11

Commentator

Fidel to be worn, Fidel to be obeyed, absolutely:

Text

"Commander-in-chief, command us."

29.30

Commentator

For the people who carve Fidel's face in the pavement, the cult of Fidelismo is part of Cuban culture. Only the intellectuals are in a position to see that this comes very close to a religion.